EMERGENCY FIRST AID

Often our first reaction to coming upon a serious injury is often excitable and confusing. To some extent, we tend to panic. Often all the things we have learned about first aid vanish.

Most of us react well to less serious medical problems or injuries. When a person gets a cut, or even when he falls and breaks an arm, it is easy to see and understand what is wrong and to handle it without great emotion or confusion. Panic happens most often when the victim is unconscious, dazed, or where there is a great deal of blood or serious disfigurement. In other words, when we don't know exactly what is wrong with the victim but suspect it is quite serious. This is what we will be addressing.

Good emergency first aid requires a priority response approach, you take care of the most life-threatening things first, then move to the less critical problems. One of the most common techniques to use is the **ABCDEF'S** principle;

A = Airway and Cervical Spine
B = Breathing
C = Circulation – bleeding
D = Disability
E = Exposure and examine
F = Freezing (cold injury)
S = Shock

We should always include the "S" for shock, since it may be present in any serious injury or illness.

A = Check his **AIRWAY**. Is it open? If there is anything obstructing his mouth (i.e. packed snow or blood or the tongue falling back blocking their throat), clear it away. To open the airway, move his lower jaw upward without moving his neck.

Assessment of the **CERVICAL SPINE** is important. To determine the possibility of injury note how the injury happened, what the victim tells you, if conscious, and carefully feel his back for deformity or tenderness. Immobilize the neck with a cervical collar or improvised collar.

B = Be sure he is **BREATHING**. Look, listen and feel for breathing. Remember, he may only live four minutes if he is not. Put your ear down next to his lips. Listen for breath, feel it on your ear or cheek, watch his chest rise or fall. If he is not breathing, start rescue breathing immediately.

C = Check his **CIRCULATION**. Does he have a pulse? The pulse in the neck (carotid pulse) is the easiest to check, because it is strongest and you can usually slip your fingers into the neck area without removing clothing and risking frostbite. If there is no pulse, and you have CPR training, start CPR. If his heart is beating and he is breathing, then further assess his circulation by checking his nailbed refill.

Blood pressure cannot be estimated easily, but you can determine if a person's blood pressure is low by checking his nailbed refill. Squeeze the victim's fingertip and nail between your own thumb and forefinger, release suddenly, and time how long it take the nail to turn from white to its normal pink colour. If it takes longer than about two seconds, it indicates that blood pressure is low. If hands are severely chilled, this may not be accurate.

Check for **SEVERE BLEEDING** (wearing latex or surgical gloves if possible) by sliding a hand under the victim, from head to toe, both sides, feeling for the wetness of blood. You must be sure that he is not bleeding badly from a point you cannot see. If he is bleeding badly, you must stop it.

D = Check for **DISABILITY**. Check level of consciousness. If you suspect a neck or head injury, immobilize the neck immediately with a cervical collar. Feel carefully underneath the victim for any obvious bumps, irregularities, or tenderness in the spine indicating damage. Shock is a life-threatening disability. If the victim shows or is likely to show the signs and symptoms of shock, begin treatment immediately.

E = **EXPOSE** and **EXAMINE**. If the weather permits, bare as much of the body as possible to look for bleeding and injuries.

F = Prevent **FREEZING** and exposure by keeping the victim warm. Cover him to keep him warm, and get something between him and the snow or the cold ground. Be sure that his hands and feet are protected. Protect him from the wind and from moisture as soon as possible.

S = Prevent **SHOCK**.

This complete check should take only a couple of minutes. Now you have done all you can to prevent quick death, and you have time to think about what to do next. These steps are fairly simple and they do not even require a first aid kit. These steps are probably the most important first aid of all and you are more likely to save a life in the first few minutes.

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